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Critical assessment/perspective

Conserving ourselves: Embedding significance into conservation decision-making in graduate education

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Graduate conservation students are well educated in many aspects of their work; however, it is difficult in the classroom to teach students how to base their conservation decisions on aspects of cultural significance. It is widely acknowledged that conservation decisions are not neutral, that they depend on cultural context and upon the predilections of the conservator and the owning individual or institution. Partnerships between community members and conservators have had a long history within conservation practices described as 'ethnographic', and such methods have arguably influenced working practices within other conservation specialties. A graduate conservation class is described in which students conserved important heritage items belonging to their classmates, in an environment where access to discoveries of significance were encouraged for their ability to inform preservation decisions. Cases are described that link decisions with specific values.

Keywords: Significance, Values, Conservation education, Ethnographic, Indigenous

Introduction

In this paper, pedagogical practices designed to embed object significance into the process of conservation work are described. Significance is based on any number of values, including, according to Brokerhof (2006), authenticity values, originality values, and 35 uniqueness, but also associative value and spiritual value. More than a decade has passed since Miriam Clavir (2002) published her insightful dissertation Preserving What is Valued, in which goals for preservation as described through values held by both cultural practitioners and conservators are discussed and debated. Ideas revealed in this work point out the conflicts between historical approaches taken by conservators only to satisfy goals for museum representation and story-telling, and the approaches fostered by some community members who believe that cultural items are both living and evolving — and are potentially placed at risk through historical conservation approaches. Over the last 20 years conservators have developed a more open, collaborative, and minimally interventive set of practices, making it possible to satisfy museum goals while sustaining community held values. Museum curators and conservators are developing ways to consider the multiple values of collections, and these ideas are incorporated into the planning of both exhibitions and conservation work.

Museum anthropologists and art historians working on indigenous collections continue to entertain an analogous debate, exploring how best to make cultural significance central to exhibition and representation (see, for example Pearce, 1989; Karp et al., 1992; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Peers & Brown, 2003; Hendry, 2005; Phillips, 2005; Richmond & Bracker 2009; Simpson, 1996). Exhibition planning for indigenous collections is being initiated by cultural relatives serving as curators, or as co-curators and advisors. Positive developments in curation and research are resulting from partnerships between museums, stakeholders, and source communities, including departures from the reliance on museumconstructed consultations, which are seen as paternalistic when of service to museums only (Mithlo, 2005; Lonetree, 2012).

Recognizing that exhibit concept and context, and associated research, all affect interpretation has consequences for museum conservation. In an important early article by Clifford (1990), he describes

how four different Northwest Coast museums chose to exhibit closely related objects. Consequent differences in the way these items were understood by the public are not the result of an objective truth, but of interpretations of significance. Similar value-based decisions help establish priorities for conservation work.

After two decades of probing evaluations in the museum sector, publications about the philosophy of conservation have appeared (Caple, 2000; MuñozViñas, 2004; Appelbaum, 2007; Janowski, 2011). I would argue that these authors, who in one case describes the conservation process as one which is interpretive rather than neutral and scientific, and in another advocates for restoration as a socially palliative act, are following up on Clavir's position published in earlier papers (Clavir et al., 1988; Clavir, 1996, 1999) before her work Preserving What is Valued, and reflect earlier principles rooted in the approach referred to as 'ethnographic conservation'. Muñoz-Viñas (2008) describes conservation processes as being in the service of preferences rather than truths. He further states that conservation '…should maintain as many meanings of that single object … as possible: it should not exhaust the ability of an object to transmit different messages.' Early papers about ethnographic materials describe preserving cultural purpose and future traditional use as important components of deciding conservation actions (Wolfe & Mibach, 1983). These early papers advocate for meeting a balance between cultural significance and material stability (Wolfe & Mibach, 1983; Rose, 1988).

Conservation and stakeholder engagement

Conservation decision-making informed by cultural significance and stakeholder opinions is slowly permeating all conservation specialties. The Burra Charter certainly informed conservation work on culturally important sites and landscapes since its drafting in 1979 and subsequent revisions (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). The Burra Charter defines conservation as a set of methods designed to preserve cultural significance, defined as aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, or spiritual value, and recognizes that these values may vary for different groups or individuals, and may be defined presently or in the future (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). Work at the Getty Conservation Institute applied these principles to the conservation of cultural sites (Avrami et al., 2000; de la Torre, 2002). But the extension to collections may frankly be seen as an outgrowth of work with communities in an approach advocated by 'ethnographic conservators' 40 years ago.

Recent preservation developments and examples of innovative conservation research illustrate various forms of public involvement, different from but potentially inspired by, community-based conservation. At world heritage sites, conservators are now working with economists to systematically collect, evaluate, and prioritize the impact of conservation decisions on visitors (L-Gomes, 2014). English Heritage sites have served as laboratories for visitors to distinguish whether alteration to furniture veneers should be considered damage or just change (Luxford & Thickett, 2013). Curators and conservators at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, Sweden created a public exhibition entitled Lighting Lab where visitors adjusted and evaluated illumination levels for paintings, with preferences collected for use in a lighting redesign (Evans & Kåborg, 2013). Inviting those who value heritage to share their thoughts with technically trained experts — in order to influence environmental and conservation decisions — provides knowledge transmission that is perhaps an outgrowth of earlier conservation working methods described as 'ethnographic'. An important distinction is that papers published in the 1980s were based on working with communities for whom museums were places of misrepresentation and exploitation. In contrast to the examples from England and Europe, conservators in Canada and the United States working in partnership with communities holding traditional knowledge sought to reverse earlier injustices (Wolfe & Mibach, 1983). Another development in the late 1990s saw conservators working with contemporary artists, stakeholders recognized as holding knowledge of original intent (Voices of Contemporary Art, formerly International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art-North America, n.d.).

The term ethnographic has been a source of controversy because of its historical use to hierarchically classify specific communities and their cultural heritage (Moses, 1992, 2008; Bloomfield, 2008; Dignard, 2011, 2012). The core of the so-called ethnographic conservation approach is one that acknowledges communities as holding different and arguably more important knowledge than the conservator about an item's meanings and cultural roles. The conservator possesses technical, ethical, and documentation expertise but collaborates with others to interpret and make choices about appropriate access, handling, and interventions. Since, in the case of indigenous material, this approach developed in opposition to earlier practices where items were removed to colonial museums and categorized and classified for study and exhibit, the consequent change in approach necessitates community assessment of cultural significance as a required precursor to conservation interventions. Collections considered under the title 'ethnographic' are surrounded by issues including, but not limited to, wrongful collection, historic misrepresentation in museums, and misappropriation in the museum and beyond. This distinguishes these collections and categories of knowledge from others where invited stakeholders more recently central to conservation decisionmaking share cultural backgrounds with both the institutions and the items under review. Such processes demonstrate how all items eligible for conservation have associated value, how such an approach is relevant to all specialties within conservation, and since interventions are not objective, knowledge of cultural significance gathered before conservation is especially meaningful for indigenous materials, but is also relevant for other cultural materials.

Teaching collaborative conservation

I have developed and taught a graduate course entitled Conservation and Ethnography, first offered in 2007 and then offered biennially, most recently in 2014. The course was developed in partnership with the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum (ACCM), a tribal museum in Palm Springs, CA, affiliated with the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (Pearlstein, 2008). The course, which is required for graduate conservation students in the UCLA/Getty Program in Archaeological and Ethnographic Conservation, includes collaborations resulting in sharing of cultural, technical, and analytical expertise among students, ACCM staff, and native guest instructors. Both technical knowledge and a clear understanding of tribal museum goals are imparted to the students, which taken together invariably impact conservation decision-making. On the other hand, the specific history of the objects under study is often largely unavailable, and this leads to unavoidable gaps in the knowledge that informs conservation decisions, leading to the design of the class that is the subject of this paper. In the case of the class taught with ACCM, staff including the director and curator, and tribal board members involved in the founding of the museum, share knowledge with the students about the role of the museum in the community. Students complete thorough research and examinations, and carry out conservation treatments and rehousing of ACCM objects based on discussions with ACCM staff and guest instructors.

Students learn about the significance of the items in the collection through an understanding of the ACCM museum goals and through the importance of revitalization of basketry to southern California tribes. The lack of specific historical details for many ACCM objects arises from collecting practices which include the unfortunate need of the museum to compete for the purchase of long dissociated Cahuilla items, and the receipt of donations collected as souvenirs, where the most significant associations are to the collector (Pearce, 1989, p. 7). Cultural materials collected by leading tribal family members fall into the latter category. Both collecting practices result in telling us as much about the collector as about the items, i.e. one collector affixed tape to each basket, writing what they surmised to be the cultural affiliation, another collected baskets from the Fraser and Thompson River regions in British Columbia. Scholars who study museum collections acknowledge the frustration caused by limited documentation (Phillips, 2005, p. 91). While specific details such as maker or cultural use may be undocumented, tribal guest instructors who are basket weavers and experts provide significant interpretive information to help fill these gaps.

When examining items with scarce accompanying information, students consult information available about parallel objects within other museums. Richly illustrated, searchable online museum collections augment other forms of scholarship for researching unattributed items, though museum information may be incomplete or inaccurate. In the case of materials from the Pacific Northwest, the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia has developed a Reciprocal Research Network, providing an exceptional resource. The Reciprocal Research Network hosts almost 500 000 images and records from 26 institutions, and allows registered users outside of the museum to supply additional historical and cultural information about items (Rowley et al., 2010). Resources such as this give students a broader perspective than what may be held in museum catalogs. When items are collected casually with little of their context revealed, conservation can aid forensically by adding information (Pearlstein, 2010; Sully & Cardoso, 2014). This is a frequent outcome of the class and an aid to the ACCM (Pearlstein et al., 2008; Pearlstein, 2013).

To embed the idea of an exploration of significance as a first step in a conservation assessment of museum objects, conservators must confront the high percentage of items lacking documentation. For many items conserved in both the museum and private sectors, the physical object is the dominant source of information because it is what we have. What information then forms the basis for addressing the needs of material stabilization without compromising the multiple significances an item can hold? How do conservators learn to assess significance? Despite the robust literature about the importance of values in conservation decision-making (de la Torre & Avrami, 2000; Arami, 2002; Martelli et al., 2005; Australia ICOMOS, 2013; Sully, 2013), students enter the UCLA/Getty graduate program unfamiliar with significance assessment as part of conservation practice, potentially suggesting that it was not a step taken during students' preprogram work. Conservators well educated in materials science, ethics, and craft must develop their abilities to explore significance before proposing conservation steps.

Exploring significance

During the 2014–2015 academic year the course Conservation and Ethnography was offered with a new methodology designed specifically to permit students to explore significance. While this course had always been used to focus on ACCM basketry collections and shared instruction, the new class had the students being both the owners and the conservators of cultural heritage. Work with ACCM continues to provide instruction about tribal museum goals and knowledge sharing by cultural relatives, while the new course would allow the students to serve as both cultural relatives and conservators. A course with ACCM followed this new class, as a means for reinforcing concepts. Each student was informed about a requirement to bring to class a family heirloom, that is, an item with strong associative values to either the student or to members of their extended family. The items had to be portable, and exhibiting condition problems.

Students were unaware of the course design which required that they work not on their own family heirloom, but that of another member of the class, as conservators most often work on someone else's heritage, often to achieve goals which are detached from earlier cultural associations. When the items were introduced, their strong values initially caused students to defer to the familial heir for handling and movement. The fact that this does not happen with other objects demonstrates how neutralized collections become once in a museum and lab, when handling is defined by professional roles. Since all of the students are graduate conservators and part of a trusting cohort, handling was well negotiated. By conserving items belonging to the students' families, sources of knowledge about significance were available, and students needed to grasp how best to acquire that knowledge and interpret it for conservation work.

The first requirement for each student was to conduct research that would allow them to complete a significance statement. A template was borrowed from the Collections Council of Australia's *Significance 2.0; a guide to assessing the significance of collections* (Russell & Winkworth, 2009), developed for

museums, libraries, and archives in Australia. Many years in the making, this document aims to 'advance the stability and sustainability of the collections sector, through communication, consultation, and resolution of common issues; promote benchmarks and standards for the care and management of collections; and promote access to and participation in Australian cultural heritage collections' (Russell & Winkworth, 2009, p. vi). Additional goals relate specifically to the operations of public collections. The template provided in this publication advocates steps sometimes common to the background research performed for materials conservation, including researching history and provenance through archival methods, analyzing the fabric and condition of objects, and looking for comparable examples against which to gauge, for example, rarity, completeness, and makers' intent (Russell & Winkworth, 2009, pp. 1:38). The assessment also includes a step not always practiced: interviewing knowledgeable people to whom the item is significant (Russell & Winkworth, 2009, pp. 1:38). The goal of placing emphasis on a significance assessment was to make these steps deliberate and impactful on conservation decision-making.

The enforced assignment of a significance assessment obligated students to perform research outside of the lab and library. Students were advised to interview the owner, either directly or through their classmate, and to request any associated family archives and images, as well as to seek out parallel examples to complete a written evaluation. Students were encouraged to ask what aspects of the physical object are most important to its owner, and whether there is a physical state that the owner feels best represents the item's significance, and why. The first section of the documentation prepared by each student included a written and illustrated statement about the item's significance.

Case studies

The exchange of background information offered by the students provided an intimacy between the students and the items that does not usually occur with borrowed museum objects. Among the eight items brought in was a pieced textile including needlework with velvet borders. The student initially brought in another item, though exchanged it for the textile when she realized its relevance to the class and her mother's great attachment to it. Through the emphasis placed on significance in the class, both the inheritor and her classmate learned that the needlework was made by the student's great-great grandmother in Armenia before 1918. At some point after 1918, her great-great grandmother attached to the needlework three centimeter-wide borders of red velvet from her own wedding dowry. Further research indicated that traditional Armenian wedding dowries have since the eleventh century included items from the bedroom (Goskar, 2011), and this red velvet was from a bed sheet gifted to the great-great grandmother. Even more striking is the fact that this assembled textile traveled in 1920 to Iran with the family, who were fleeing Armenian genocide and Russian occupation. The family returned to Armenia in 1928, and then back to Iran, where they stayed until 1966 when three generations of the family immigrated to the United States, bringing the textile with them (McClintock, 2014).

The textile assemblage arrived in our labs stapled to a repurposed piece of plywood paneling. The student heritor's mother recalled seeing the textile hanging in the family's homes. Even before the extraordinary details of the textile's significance came to light, the student had observed the differences between the fine stitching and good condition of the needlework, and the extensive wear and irregular attachment of the velvet borders. Once documented and removed from the board, the color retention on the back versus the fading on the front supported family reports of long-term display. Various material observations along with prevailing conservation concepts of minimum intervention were factored; however, the priority for conservation decision-making was the significance. If the textile's history and family value had been unknown, conservators would likely choose to recommend dark storage in order to preserve the dyed fibers. Conversely, the velvet and needlework would not have been separated during conservation treatment even if family information had been absent. However, once the importance of the velvet and of family access to this textile were identified, they became the major focal points in the conservation treatment. Conservation focused on stabilizing tears in the velvet (Fig. 1), creating a padded sink mount

for the textile (Fig. 2), and supplying glazing with ultraviolet filtering Plexiglas® as well as framing instructions to enable continued display. The report prepared for the family incorporates the significance documentation and includes an image of the textile's original owner (McClintock, 2014).

Figure 1 Detail of tears in velvet border. Photo courtesy of T. McClintock.

Figure 2 Conserved and mounted needlework. Photo courtesy of T. McClintock.

The second case study was a set of two well-worn duck decoys with missing heads carved by a family member perhaps as long as a century ago, and originating from Cedar Island, in the Outer Banks region of the North Carolina coast (Fig. 3). The themes arising from research include traditions of subsistence living, craftsmanship, a connection to the history and ecology of the Outer Banks specifically, and the continuation of these traditions through multiple generations within the Day family (Burr, 2014; Day,

2014). The two decoys were conserved by two students, one by a non-relative and the other by the student heir. The decoys were often carved out of available, repurposed wood. This aided X-radiographic and visual analysis, which found unused nail holes and other functionless hardware. The decoy wood was microscopically identified as coniferous. The wood typically used for duck decoys is known as Atlantic White Cedar, which despite actually being a cypress and not a cedar (Kelsey & Dayton 1942), is known locally as juniper. The important lesson here is to not necessarily challenge community naming practices, but to determine what they contribute alongside the technical capacity to characterize wood. Community naming practices are significant for what they convey about specific knowledge and associations, for example in the case of one North American decoy carver, the wood choice relates to the working properties associated with that wood, and the prices that those decoys command (Burrison, 2011).

Figure 3 One of two duck decoys as received. Photo courtesy of E. Burr.

In the case of the decoys, the owners provided information essential for the treatment. The decoys are considered retired and used only for indoor display, and therefore the consolidation of multiple layers of lifting paint could be performed with adhesives soluble in water. Family members informed which duck species were typically represented, and that decoys could be repurposed to resemble another species, so that painted campaigns of decoration could then be identified with the different species denoted (Burr, 2014; Day, 2014). In an important departure from minimally interventive conservation practice, the descendant student's family not only advocated for reintegrating the missing heads, but provided wooden duck heads carved by a family member for integration into the duck decoys (Fig. 4). Without provision of these carvings, or an understanding of the family's role in decoy carving, no attempt would have been made to replace the heads as part of a minimally interventive conservation treatment. In this case, we considered the approach taken by members of descendant communities in the conservation of museum objects as the most appropriate approach. The students explored how best to finish and attach the carved wooden heads to the decoy bodies using reversible methods. This practice, involving collaborative conservation, is central to shared authority and participation in conservation of indigenous collections (Smith, 1994; Chang and Heald, 2006). Two further examples, an embroidery and a pair of cuckoo clocks, had equally compelling significance to the students and their families, informing the conservation outcomes. In the case of the embroidery, it was made by the great-great grandmother of a current student, whose family immigrated to the Midwestern United States from Forres, Scotland, during the 1860s. The embroidery was passed down through generations of women in the family, and student research identified it as owned by her classmate's mother and displayed on the wall in a room where the family congregates (Khanaferov, 2014). In the case of the clocks, one clock was gifted to a current student in 1999–2000, after being owned by her grandmother. The second clock was purchased by the student in Germany after being inspired by her grandmother. The student had traveled with both clocks extensively which had impacted their current damaged condition (Shelley, 2014).

Figure 4 Second duck decoy with unpainted head provided by a family member. Photo courtesy of L. Day.

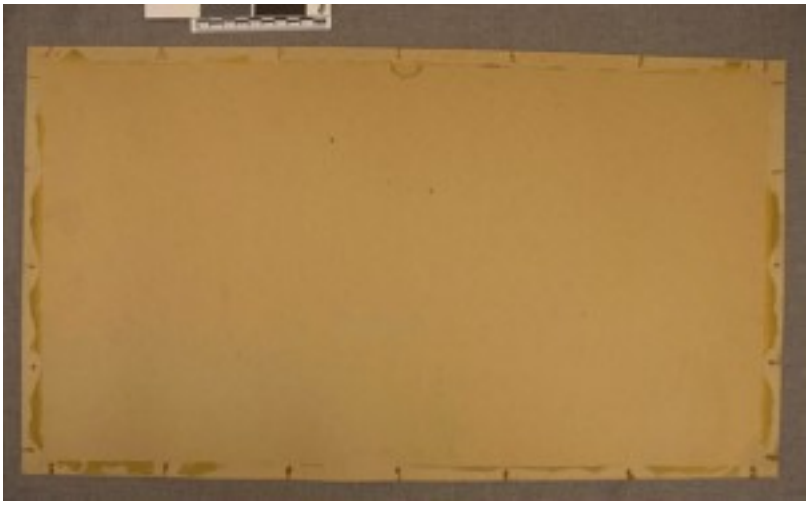

Figure 5 Reverse of textile mounting board, with evidence of previous fasteners. Photo courtesy of C. Khanaferov.

Both the embroidery and the clocks needed to be able to resume their former functions: the embroidery as a framed memento of a great-great grandmother, and the clocks as functioning and complete reminders of a grandmother's collections. Once these significance factors were established, material details were better able to be placed in context. As a valued item for display, the embroidery had evidence of being reframed multiple times. While Victorian embroidered seating and cushion covers are common, there is no evidence that this textile was ever used three-dimensionally. Similar to the Armenian textile, this embroidery in a museum might have been retired to prevent further exposure; however, its significance in the family home guided the conservation. As received, the embroidery canvas was wrapped and then adhered around the edges to the reverse of an acidic cardboard backing. Evidence of previous framing included masking tape and metal corrosion from former fasteners (Fig. 5). The embroidery has fringed borders concealed by the most recent presentation, and once unfolded it was too large for the frame. The backing board did not retain any significance in the form of inscriptions. Treatment included reversing the adhesive and removing the tape, relaxing the folding creases all around the margin, and replacing the backing with an acid-free board covered with a neutral cotton-linen blend fabric. The embroidery was returned in a larger frame resembling the one it came in, and with ultraviolet filtering Plexiglas®, to permit its return to its central family display location (Fig. 6) (Khanaferov, 2014).

Figure 6 Conserved and mounted embroidered textile. Photo courtesy of C. Khanaferov.

The cuckoo clocks brought up issues of mechanical functionality. The significance of the clocks included having them intact and fully operational. Discussions about the significance and value of mechanical objects can lead to preserving clocks in their non-functioning state, which has parallels with musical instruments maintained not for playing, but as sculpture (for example, in the case of African instruments, Speranza, 2008). It can also lead to function as the most important consideration for conservation. Examples include maintaining the performative nature of a 1932 Steinway piano once owned and played by Canadian jazz pianist Glenn Herbert Gould, whose practice included unconventional tuning and physical wear and tear (Barclay, 2005), or the vitality of potlatch masks (traditional gift giving regalia) created by lending them from a museum to the U'mista Cultural Center in Alert Bay, British Columbia (Clavir, 1996). In the case of the clocks, their recent date and European heritage indicated by markings on the mechanisms allowed them to be dated to 1970s Germany, creating comfort with the decision to order the missing hands and pendulum from a catalog (Shelley, 2014) (Fig. 7). Components of these clocks were mass produced, and we therefore felt comfortable using purchased replacements. The significance informed the conservator about the importance of restoring functionality, and the technical analysis provided evidence leading to replacement parts.

Figure 7 Conserved cuckoo clock with replaced hands and pendulum. Photo courtesy of W. Shelley.

The design of the class demonstrated examples of items where significance directly informed conservation treatment decisions, as well as examples where this was not the case. In the latter example, the student maintained a strong connection with the heritage they brought in, but the details of its history were not well recalled. One student brought in quilled birch bark containers that were used in a family cottage on the Canadian great lakes. These containers were associated with a particular place but less so with particular people. These items fell into the category of less well documented collections, and conservation work was predominantly materials based.

Lessons learned

Conducting a class in which students performed conservation work on heirlooms, the life of which had become known to them through dialog with the owners, created parallels with the ways in which conservators work with indigenous community members. Few of these items fall neatly into the category of ethnographic or indigenous objects, illustrating the broader application of significance research into conservation decision-making. Students recognized an 'expert' outside of themselves, and the object and its material analysis were not the sole sources of information. A respectful and careful approach was taken when the students needed to work with each other to learn about associated, and possibly private, family values. As previously mentioned, students initially deferred to the heir on issues of handling. Some conservation priorities also shifted. For example, students gained insights into why a light damaged textile may be of greatest value when kept on continual display, or why a family member is the most appropriate person to provide a compensation.

In the case of this class, treatments of five of the items would have been performed differently in the absence of significance assessments, while one treatment was unaffected. Using decisions informed exclusively by material needs and principles of minimal intervention, the two textiles would have been

removed from acidic mounts, stored in light-protective enclosures, and relegated to storage. The duck decoys may have received different paint compensation methods, and replacements of the heads would have been viewed as an unnecessary intervention. Functionality would not have been crucial for the cuckoo clocks. A review of these outcomes makes explicit the ways in which significance informs conservation treatments. These same outcomes could have resulted as a consequence of museum goals designed to evoke public responses; however, such goals insinuate object meanings rather than serve them.

In considering future course offerings, opportunities need to be identified where items and access to their significance are both available. Significance is often undocumented, intangible, personal, and subject to differing views among community members. Significance sharing comes from relationships of trust, and it was found that friendships influenced object selections within a cohort working closely together over time. All of these variables made this an ideal model. Creating an opportunity, and obligation, for students to question and document significance, and especially its impact on conservation, enhances professional understanding and ultimately practice. It further borrows consultative practices founded in 'ethnographic' conservation and demonstrates their utility when applied to the conservation of nonindigenous items.

Students felt positive about the need to create a significance statement, a new and unfamiliar step for them in approaching conservation. Present and past students have often challenged whether methods of inquiry about significance and context, most often applied to the conservation of indigenous collections, should be taught in a course that includes conservation treatment, referring to time constraints. A division between principles or theory of methods developed for indigenous conservation, and the articulation of a revised approach to conservation interventions is at the heart of revising practice and is therefore central to what the course aimed to address. Further illustrating how methods developed for indigenous collections have richness and relevance to all cultural heritage is another important goal met by this class. Topics focusing on indigenous rights, the history of indigenous representation, and the relationships between museums and communities can be well served by courses whose focus may not be conservation. Articles that explore the kinds of two-way learning possible through community-based conservation work (Carrington et al., 2014), and which look at issues besetting indigenous collections, including toxic pesticide residues and impact of legislation and treaties, serve as an excellent backdrop to contextualizing why practice should be, and is, changing. However, embedding significance exploration as an inexorable part of the conservation process requires examples where students understand the roots of their own decision-making. How better than by conserving 'ourselves' and our own heritage?

Conclusions

Conservation practice has increasingly involved a broad range of community participants. Would all of these community invitations have happened without the precedent of working practices developed by 'ethnographic' or world cultures conservators? In this paper I argue that community-based practice, as advocated by specialist conservators beginning in the 1980s, influenced other conservation specialists to develop and recognize the value of community involvements to conservation work. The incorporation of values audits into site conservation provided an equally important influence (Avrami *et al*., 2000). The examples described in this paper are important because they present practices developed for what are not conventionally described as indigenous materials, yet illustrate how methods developed to assess significance and value are translatable.

The paper discusses a graduate conservation course where students worked on heirlooms drawn from their classmates' family collections. Even though conservators are always working on someone's heritage, the context of a museum neutralizes important connections, note for example the hesitancy in handling when the owner is an individual versus a museum, and museums may make the cultural context secondary (see, for example, the controversy surrounding the display of Sikh scriptural books and Korans

in the Chandigarh Museum in India, Singh, 2013). In teaching with ACCM, students in the UCLA/Getty Program in the Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials are taught the importance of self-representation, cultural revitalization, and the role of collections in the mission of a tribal museum. Because of the history of the Agua Caliente Band and the relatively young museum's collecting practices, access to the individual significance of each item is often difficult to obtain, and must be reconstructed through various means. The design of the course described in this paper allowed the items of study to have strong and accessible significance to at least one student and family. The student conservator was able to perform a significance assessment and to translate how this influences conservation work.

Conservation decisions made through an evaluation of significance may differ markedly from those made in the absence of contextual information, or they may not change decisions at all. Examples drawn from the students' family collections emphasize how values lead to major interventions, such as in the case of the duck decoys and cuckoo clocks, or determined display methods, such as in the case of the textiles. In each case, the students applied their technical, ethical, and documentary expertise in implementing a conservation approach that does '….not exhaust the ability of an object to transmit different messages' (MuñozViñas, 2008).

While it is not possible for conservators to routinely work on heirlooms drawn from their own family heritage, doing so within a class structure demonstrates how conservation decision-making is decidedly non-neutral when values and associations are fore-fronted. Graduate students learn how to apply principles from this class to other conservation classes, and learn a methodology for assessing significance as a precursor to proposing conservation actions, either preventive or interventive. Conservation educators play an important role in modeling values-based decision-making in treatment classes. Significance should be playing a major role in conservation education. It is hoped that by providing the outcomes of such assessments along with the impacts on treatment and presentation decisions, that readers may be encouraged to examine, articulate, and document values informing their own treatment decisions.

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